



M O N T A N A
C O A L I T I O N A G A I N S T
D O M E S T I C A N D S E X U A L
V I O L E N C E

TO: House Human Services Committee
FROM: Kelsen Young, Executive Director
Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
DATE: February 18th, 2009
RE: HB 596 – Healthy Youth Sex Education

EXH-B11 3 HCH
DATE 2-18-09
HB 596

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the record my name is Kelsen Young and I am the Executive Director of the Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. We represent domestic and sexual violence programs providing direct services in your communities across the State. We rise in strong support of HB 596 and appreciate Representative Henry for bringing this bill forward.

We believe strongly that the youth of Montana need more information than current programming provides – especially those programs that have an abstinence-only focus. Specifically, we would like to draw your attention to the aspects of the teen pregnancy prevention instruction guidelines that focus on the prevention of dating violence and sexual violence. Please see page 3, new section 3 for the specific components of the program. Our comments specifically pertain to components listed in subsections 4 - 8.

I first want to draw your attention to the “whereas” section. Specifically:

- Females ages 16 to 24 are **more** vulnerable to intimate partner violence **than any other** age group, at a rate almost triple the national average.
- According to the 2007 Montana youth risk behavior study conducted by the Office of Public Instruction, 11% of Montana teens reported that they had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt by the other person in a relationship and 9% were forced to have sex when they didn't want to.

Dating and sexual violence are a reality for youth in Montana. National studies show that one in five teens in a serious relationship reports having been hit, slapped, or pushed by a partner. In terms of sexual violence towards teens, a recent study showed that in 2001, more than 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 were the victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape. Also, twenty-nine percent of young girls in a relationship felt pressured to have sex or engage in sex they did not want.

In a report entitled “Our Vulnerable Teenagers: Their Victimization, Its Consequences, and Directions for Prevention and Intervention” the authors specifically recommend, as a strategy to curbing violence towards teens, that schools implement a sex education program with a focus on victimization **prevention**. The experts also say that early education and prevention works both ways – it informs young people of the potential to be victimized, and also teaches young people of their potential to become the perpetrator of these types of crimes.

After high school, young men and women are sent out into the world and have to navigate this world with whatever teachings they have been given from family, friends, their community, and our schools. It is our responsibility as a community to adequately inform young people of how to protect themselves from harm, how to make informed decisions, and how to make their communities better and healthier. In our opinion, currently we are simply not doing a good enough job. The addition of the healthy youth act will allow us an opportunity to invest more in our youth and show them that we value their safety and their access to information.

MCADSV has been actively engaged in developing a prevention project since 2003. This project, funded by the CDC, is groundbreaking. For the past 6 years we have been funding the following four counties to do this work: Carbon, Hill, Missoula, and Ravalli. You will also receive testimony today from an Educator from the program in Carbon County. I encourage you to visit our website for more information. <http://www.mcadsv.com/DELTA-1.html>

We ask that you please support this bill and pass it out of committee. We are available to answer questions and provide any further background information to the committee.

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